

STEPHEN M. LINSKY – WARD 2 ALDERMAN

FALL 2005 CONSTITUENT UPDATE

Hello Everyone:

I report once again to update you on developments over the past year relating to my service on the Board of Aldermen. In addition to issuing annual reports and publishing notices in the Newton TAB, I also periodically post items on the city's website. You can find these postings at: <http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/Aldermen/constituents.asp>

This past term was largely dominated by the budget and developments in the construction of a new Newton North high school.

Various cuts were proposed in this year's budget to address projected shortfalls, including those to public safety and education. While additional state aid helped restore some of the proposed cuts to the school budget, there were still reductions to various programs, aids, and library staff. The reduction in police and firefighting forces included de-commissioning Engine 6. Even though the budget resolution failed to identify a secured funding source, I joined with other members of the Board, in an effort spearheaded by Alderman Scott Lennon, to pass a budget resolution requesting the continued funding of Engine 6 through the first quarter of this fiscal year until a public hearing was held on the matter. While the resolution passed, the request was ultimately rejected by the mayor. I then proposed and passed a resolution to disclose updated insurance ratings affecting homeowner premiums in advance of the public hearing. The mayor pledged that such ratings will be disclosed this fall. I have since supported placing an item on this year's ballot to enable Newton voters to consider an approximately one-half million dollar override to fund restoration of Engine, 6 even though I do not favor an override for the purpose of supporting the city's operational budget. I do favor mechanisms, including debt exclusions, for the purpose of addressing the city's capital needs, particularly our public buildings and roads, which have long suffered from delayed or inadequate maintenance.

A growing number of Newton citizens, myself included, are increasingly troubled by the spectre of future budget years that are likely to encounter shortfalls similar to that which we faced this year. Whether these shortfalls result from unanticipated events, such as the unusually high snow removal costs of last year, or from the rising energy costs we will face this year, few believe we can maintain the city's fiscal health without effectuating some changes in our practices. A magic bullet is unlikely. But in addition to exploring additional revenue sources, we need to examine changes in our management approaches in both the school and city budgets. I have joined with fellow Board members who are interested in exploring a number of initiatives, ranging from zero-based budgeting principles, and benchmarking practices using comparative communities to derive best practices in everything from purchasing to managerial compensation.

I have continued to advocate for increased public participation in the Newton North High School project throughout the process of selecting the project manager and architect. And I will continue to advocate for public participation including the selection of the construction manager. That is why I have advocated for publicly observed candidate interviews and objected when the mayor privately contacted members of the Designer Selection Committee in the midst of their selection of a project manager. Maintaining an open and transparent process free from undue influence is a critical ingredient to ensuring we end up with the new high school project we desire.

Whether it is working with neighbors regarding neighborhood development, traffic and parking issues, zoning and a myriad of other issues, I am fortunate to be able to join with other dedicated city officials and elected representatives, including fellow Ward 2 Aldermen Marcia Johnson and Susan Albright, Ward 2 School Committee member Reenie Murphy, and our entire state legislative delegation. I am pleased our collaborative approach is becoming recognized. Hopefully, this approach will continue to grow throughout our municipality and be embraced by those who seek to fill the ranks of city government, as I sense, among others, that Ben Weisbuch and Leslie Burg who are running for open seats on the Board of Aldermen and Claire Sokoloff and Jonathan Yeo who are running for open seats on the School Committee will do.

As always, I am interested in hearing from you, whether it is during my annual fall walking tour of the district, or by contacting me at: (617) 796-1701 or at: slinsky@ci.newton.ma.us